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Chapter 7

Point One: The Favor of God to the Unregenerate

Relative to the first point, which concerns the question of *a favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general*, and not only towards the elect, synod declares it to be established according to the Scripture and the Confessions, that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordrecht, II, 5 and III, IV, 8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed fathers from the past favored this view.

‘Let us consider, first of all,’ writes Herman Hoeksema, ‘the chief proposition of the first point. It is, evidently: there is a grace of God over His creatures in general’ (Hoeksema 1942:14). Writing specifically on the well-meant offer of the Gospel as contained in the writings of Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder, A. C. de Jong agrees that this point of common grace revolves around the favorable attitude of God towards all (De Jong 1954:11). This all, or better, humanity in general, would encompass both those who have been elect of God from before the foundation of the world and those whom we might also classify as reprobate. Or, as De Jong puts it, the debate concerns ‘the attitude or disposition of the God of the Divine Decree towards those whom he decreed to pass by with the redemptively efficacious operations of divine favor’ (De Jong 1954:11). Both Hoeksema and De Jong agree that calling this attitude or disposition of God ‘favorable’ or ‘gracious’ is the heart of the rub. For De Jong, unless one can consider the attitude of God towards all those who hear the Gospel as one of favor and grace then preaching,

among other things, will suffer greatly (De Jong 1954:101-102). Contrariwise, Hoeksema's position, as De Jong readily admits, is that God is 'never favorably disposed towards those human beings whom he decreed to pretermite and condemn' (De Jong 1954: 11). Hence, while De Jong believes that grace is general both in its scope and application, for Hoeksema grace is, always and everywhere, strictly particular. But what exactly do these men mean by 'grace'?

7.1 Grace

'To arrive at an accurate conception of the operation of the will of God,' insists Hoeksema, 'we cannot proceed from the meaning of the word grace in our everyday usage of the term, nor even from its usage in Holy Scripture' (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:164). Further, we must study all the terms with great care so as not to create a concept of our own choosing; giving to God a quality as it exists in the creature, an anthropomorphism if you will. Rather, 'we must work theologically. God Himself determines the character of His will, grace, love, hate, wrath, and so forth' (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:164). But, how is this to be done? First, we must examine the Biblical record in detail for all occurrences of the word. 'But this is by no means sufficient to reach an accurate concept of the grace of God,' Hoeksema warns. 'Indeed, we are not dealing with the use of the *word* grace, but with the *idea* of grace—grace as it is in God' (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:165). After searching the Scriptures thoroughly, our findings must, therefore, be compared with other translations of the Scriptures, the Confessions of the church, liturgical forms and the works of other

theologians as well as the many related words (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:165). ‘This comparative study,’ Hoeksema concludes, ‘will enable us to see that the same concrete idea is expressed by all these words, and many others, even though it is true that each of these words, some with interchangeable meanings, usually shows us the rich grace of God from a particular viewpoint and in a special relationship’ (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:165-166). Even here, we are still not finished. Delving deeper, Hoeksema concludes:

All of this must be elucidated and interpreted in connection with God’s counsel and eternal purpose. We are dealing here with what God wills. That will cannot be explained by something *apart from* God. The main reason for God’s will must be sought *in God Himself*. God’s will reveals itself in connection with man’s sin. That sin did not take God by surprise, did not occur in creation apart from His counsel and will. Thus, we are concerned with the study of God’s will of electing grace and reprobating wrath as works which, in the end, must be ascribed to God. God’s grace and disfavor are not determined by one or another attribute in God, but by God Himself—or if we may express ourselves in this manner—by the fullness of God. We must even diligently guard ourselves against separating the attributes of God. God attributes are in a certain sense to be distinguished, but are not essentially different from the essence of God, neither individually nor collectively. We are dealing with God Himself: God’s grace and disfavor, His love and His hatred. Election and reprobation are His—God’s. He finds reasons in Himself for His will. This is true whether we understand it or not, whether we will it or not. (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:166.)

Hence, in defining grace, Hoeksema starts specifically with God and ‘as an attribute of God, *grace is that divine virtue according to which God is the perfection of all beauty and loveliness, and contemplates Himself as such with infinite delight*’ (Hoeksema 1966:112). Expounding further on the idea of grace as an attribute of God, Hoeksema writes:

Now Scripture emphasizes everywhere that God is gracious. He is the God of all grace, the all-gracious God. He is gracious in Himself, apart from any relation to the creature. For also here we must remember that God is the independent, the Self-existent, the Self-sufficient One. He is not in need of the creature. He does

not become richer through the existence of the creature. In and through the creature He only reveals Himself and glorifies Himself in His riches, that also the creature may glorify Him. And thus all the virtues of God are in Him independently and absolutely. This also applies to the virtue of grace. God is eternally a God of all grace. He is grace. Graciousness is an attribute, or perfection, of His very Being. Grace belongs to God's holy name. ...In and of Himself God is gracious. And here we must remember the fundamental meaning of the word "grace." It is the virtue of being pleasant and attractive, beautiful and graceful, and that too, with a beauty that is rooted in and based on ethical perfection. In this sense one can readily understand that God is gracious. For He is the Holy One. He is the implication of all goodness, of all ethical perfections. Goodness is His very Being. He is a light, and there is no darkness in Him at all. He is righteousness, justice, and truth, peace, and love, and life. He is the only Good. For that reason God is also infinitely beautiful, charming, pleasant, and attractive. Even as the ethically corrupt is repulsive and ugly, so the ethically perfect is truly beautiful and pleasant. In the absolute sense of the word, therefore, grace in God is the beauty of His infinite perfections, the charm of His divine goodness. (Hoeksema 1966:111.)

Following from his conception of grace as first and foremost an attribute of God, Hoeksema then seeks to draw out the implications for 'the believer;' he writes: 'Objectively, then, the word "grace" denotes beauty or gracefulness; subjectively, it denotes a gracious disposition or favorable attitude towards someone' (Hoeksema 1966:109). Still, Hoeksema is quick to point out that this attitude of graciousness or undeserved favor is never separated from God's sovereignty and freedom (Hoeksema 1966:109). In fact, it is primarily because of God's sovereignty and freedom, i.e. in election, that grace is shown to the creature at all. 'Grace, then, in this sense,' Hoeksema further elaborates, 'is such a favorable disposition or friendly attitude of God as is revealed even to those that are wholly undeserving in themselves, yea, have wholly forfeited His kindness and favor, and are worthy of wrath and damnation' (Hoeksema 1966:109). On the same page Hoeksema is quick to contrast grace with works.

It is interesting to note that, of all the proponents of common grace, William Masselink is only one of a handful that attempt to ground a particular view of common

grace in God. David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Churches believes that if anyone is going to attempt a defense of common grace, a firm grounding is an absolute necessity. In fact, Engelsma contends, ‘many defenders of common grace are woefully weak here. They make much of a common grace of God in history that has no source in God’s eternal plan and no goal in God’s everlasting purpose’ (Engelsma 2003:75). While Masselink may seek his ground elsewhere, within the ‘ontological trinity’ (Masselink 1953:190) to be exact, the fact that he seeks to ground his doctrine in God rather than in a simple historical setting is, by Engelsma’s criterion, surely commendable. On his decision to ground his doctrine in the very being of God, Masselink writes:

The ontological trinity as it expresses itself in God’s ontological qualities is the source of all common grace, and to understand this rightly we must have correct views of *Divine qualities*. We deem the designation qualities to be more correct than other terms used such as, attributes, perfections, virtues, and the like; because the term quality always expresses a definite relationship to God’s essence or being. (Masselink 1953:190.)

Other than the reference to common grace, Hoeksema would agree wholeheartedly with the above. Building on his choice of the word ‘quality,’ Masselink further contends that ‘*a quality of God is a relationship to His essence or being*. Strictly speaking there is only one quality in God identical with His being, but there is a multiplicity of qualities in connection with God’s various relationships’ (Masselink 1953:190). That is to say, while we may observe only one quality within the Godhead, this one quality separates, as through a prism, into a plethora of different relational qualities. Masselink says as much. ‘On the one hand,’ he writes, ‘we maintain that there is in God strictly speaking only one quality identified with His essence; and on the other hand there exists a multiplicity of qualities in connection with God’s various relationships’ (Masselink 1953:191). Masselink further believes that the one observable quality within the ontological Trinity

is love (Masselink 1953:191). Yet, despite his assertion of being able to discover the concept of common grace in the relationship of love observable between the persons of the Godhead, i.e., within the ontological Trinity, Masselink actually accomplishes no such thing. In fact, he merely asserts that the quality of love observable within the ontological Trinity translates into common grace for the creature. From my reading of Masselink, I suspect he conceives of common grace as existing in a germinal, embryonic or typological form in this quality of love as it occurs within the ontological trinity. If my assessment is correct, common grace is really nothing more than the development in history of that which only exists in a potential form in God. It would have been helpful and allayed much speculation had Masselink worked out his theory in more detail, with considerably more to substantiate his position.

7.2 Grace and the Covenant

For Hoeksema, God's attitude of favor, kindness, and grace could only be found within the covenant of grace. It is not discussed outside of the covenant of grace, which is why he can turn around and describe the covenant, as we have seen in the previous sections, as the bond of friendship and love between God and His elect. It is also why, for Hoeksema, there is no covenant of works. When you speak of the covenant you are speaking of grace not law. This covenant, contra the views of Klaas Schilder and Wilhelm Heyns, was not a conditional covenant. It was not made with each individual within the church head for head. The covenant God made was with Christ and with the elect as they are in Christ. That is to say, the covenant was made with Christ and by

implication with those who are the elect. This covenantal relationship God had within Himself from all eternity, which is why Hoeksema stresses grace as an attribute of God. And it is this same inter-Trinitarian relationship between the members of the Godhead that was expanded to include a body of believers, those whom He has chosen from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 2) and upon whom He could bestow grace, this attitude of favor and love, because of what Christ has done. Hence, Christ is the focal point, the matrix if you will, by which this favor and love come through God to the elect, i.e. those whom He has chosen.

Since Grace is first and foremost an attribute of God, and since it is found as an integral part of the inter-Trinitarian relationship, and since believers become partakers of this grace as it is in God, for Hoeksema, dividing up or distinguishing grace into various kinds of grace becomes an almost futile exercise. In this regard Methodist Episcopal theologian Charles Buck writes that ‘there have been many distinctions of grace; but as they are of too frivolous a nature, and are now obsolete, they need not a place here’ (Buck 1826:202). Buck is not exaggerating when he states that there are many other distinctions of grace. Richard Muller, a historical theologian of some note most recently associated with Calvin Theological Seminary, in his *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* for example, lists eighteen different types of grace, with what seems to be multiple sub-categories for each (Muller 1985:129-133). Taking what amounts to a more conservative approach to grace, Ferdinand Deist of the University of South Africa lists only seventeen different varieties (Deist 1992:107-108). For Hoeksema, grace is grace just as God is God and seeking to distinguish grace into multiple sub-categories is rather pointless. On this matter Hoeksema writes:

Thus it is to be explained that not only all unbelievers, but also a great mass of Christians, do not want the doctrine of God's free grace. That God's grace is made dependent upon sinful man is a common error. Men are not opposed to God's grace if the disposal of it pleases man. Naturally, if this latter were true, man would, by grace, triumph over God. Therefore, men try to change God's grace into a work of man. They make all kinds of distinctions and speak especially of conditions. They speak of baptismal grace, preparatory grace, helping grace, covenant grace, and lastly now also of a common grace that our human race enjoys, and whereby in the so-called sphere of natural life, men are enabled to live a life that is pleasing to God, although only particular grace is saving. Mostly they speak of an objective grace, of which the subjective application is dependent upon sinful man. All these distinctions have actually no other purpose than to maintain something in the sinner over against God—a certain capability for natural or spiritual good, a certain claim upon something in God, even though that be nothing more than God's compassion. (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:172-173.)

Hoeksema goes on to say that this type of thinking is nothing more than a vain and wicked attempt, and, what is more, an impossibility. (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:173).

In Hoeksema's mind the covenant of grace is one and simply cannot be divided up. Maybe this is why Hoeksema also never spoke of various covenants. To him there is one covenant and that is the covenant controlled by sovereign, irresistible grace. Hence, he repudiated entirely the traditional notion, espoused by many Reformed theologians, of a covenant of works (Hoeksema 1966:217-221). In fact Hoeksema does not speak of the covenant apart from grace and he does not conceive of grace outside of the covenant. They go together. Therefore, neither is a means to an end. As Hoeksema writes of God's covenant with Adam: 'this covenant relation is not to be conceived as something incidental, as a means to an end, as a relation that was established by way of an agreement, but as a fundamental relationship in which Adam stood to God by virtue of his creation. It is not essentially an agreement, but a relation of living fellowship and

friendship' (Hoeksema 1966:222). The covenant of grace is, therefore, the end, in and of itself. While Hoeksema certainly is not the only Reformed theologian to speak of grace, he is, at least to my knowledge, the only one to speak solely of particular grace and that within the context of the covenant. There are others who speak of grace within the covenant, but then they speak of grace also in a general manner as well. These general ways include but are not exclusive to sunshine and rain, etc. Those who propound the idea of common grace also use these categories. In this regard, most theologians do speak of grace in ways that are not part of the covenant of grace. By contrast, speaking of grace solely within the context of the covenant, and speaking of grace as particular, seems to me to be exclusive to Hoeksema. Many who speak of the covenant apart from grace also speak of a covenant of works. As already mentioned, Hoeksema would have none of this either, since the covenant is the ground of grace, not of works. On the grounding of grace in the covenant Hoeksema explains:

The Reformed usually designate God's glory as the purpose of this will. Formerly we have sought to define this more accurately by speaking of covenant fellowship or friendship. The concept of God's glory is very abstract and has no content for our thinking. This becomes somewhat different when we consider that God is the fully Blessed One in Himself. He is fully blessed as one who lives His life of love as the triune, covenant God. God is the God of the covenant. He is that not only according to the counsel of His will in relation to the creature, but He is that, first of all, in Himself, by virtue of His nature. The family life of God is a covenant of friendship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Indeed, God is one in essence, three in persons. The three persons all possess alike the same divine essence. In their individual independency they are also alike. But in their individual, personal attributes they are different. Their oneness of essence gives them harmony; the equality of persons requires agreement, while the possibility for most intimate fellowship and cooperation lies in the diversity of their individual personal attributes. Oneness and diversity give harmony. The love-life of God, welling up from the unsearchable depths of His being, willed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and streaming forth in the many forms of the individual attributes, reveals in a glorious, variegated display the full riches of the eternal friendship of the Trinity. That divine love-life in God has become, as we see it, the basis for the fellowship and covenant relationship between the Creator and the creature, and

between the creatures mutually. That covenant idea is willed by God. He seeks a reflection of His life of friendship in the creature. That is not a cold concept. Nor is there any evidence of insensibility or hardness in it. It is truly an essentially free and sovereign act of God's will. Its essential character is glorious. The life of love and friendship in the family of God is divinely good and beautiful. To cause His creature to share in it is good and beautiful. This sovereign will of the God of the covenant is the will to reveal and glorify that which is divinely good and glorious. The life and friendship of the Trinity is thus completely enveloped in the glow of love and grace. (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:166-167).

7.3 Conditional versus Unconditional

A. C. de Jong, in the section of his thesis evaluating Hoeksema's views on the 'the gospel offer and the sinner's response' (De Jong 1954:73), turns immediately to the concept of the covenant. While he quotes Bavinck on the importance of the covenant for religion, his real concern is with the covenant concepts of Professor William Heyns as they relate to Hoeksema. After giving a bit of history detailing the relationship of Professor Heyns to Hoeksema, De Jong contends that Hoeksema's covenant views were solely the result of a backlash against, or 'sharp reaction to,' the theories espoused by Professor Heyns (De Jong 1954:73). De Jong and Hoeksema are both agreed that Professor Heyns did have considerable influence as a professor and that as a result his views on the covenant are 'generally accepted by ministers in the Christian Reformed Church' (De Jong 1954:73). They are also agreed that 'Hoeksema saw shades of Heyns in the covenantal views of many Liberated [i.e., followers of Klaas Schilder in the Netherlands] Dutch immigrants who sought affiliation with the Protestant Reformed Church' (De Jong 1954:73; Hoeksema 1969:275-276; Faber 1996:47).

Having taught for many years at what eventually became Calvin Theological Seminary, Professor William Heyns had a rather large sphere of influence. As a theologian Professor Heyns focused a good portion of his energies both in research and writing on the idea of the ‘covenant.’ He described the Covenant of Grace as: ‘that special institution for the salvation of man in which the Triune God binds Himself with a covenant and an oath to the believers and their seed, to be their God: their Father, their Redeemer, and their Sanctifier, and binds them to Himself to be His own and to serve Him, thus insuring their salvation, unless they break the Covenant by unbelief and disobedience, Gen. 17:7, Heb. 3:18, 19’ (Heyns 1926:125). Hence, for Heyns, the essence of Covenant of Grace is ‘the promise of salvation in the form of a covenant’ (Heyns 1926:125). Elsewhere, in his discussion of the Covenant of Works, Heyns brings the inherent conditionality in his conception of both covenants into sharper focus. Heyns wrote: ‘Even in the Covenant of Works the condition of obedience was not a condition for being taken into the Covenant, but for keeping the Covenant and for gaining its reward. In the same way faith and obedience are conditions for keeping the Covenant of Grace and for inheriting the promise, Heb. 6:15, whereas unbelief and disobedience make the Covenant member a Covenant breaker, who shall not enter in: Heb. 3:18-19’ (Heyns 1926:131). Professor Jelle Faber of the Canadian Reformed Church, in a rather lengthy article on *William Heyns as Covenant Theologian*, is at great pains to show how ‘Heyns was afraid of Arminianism’ (Faber 1997:303). For this reason, writes Faber, ‘when he preferred to call faith and obedience not conditions but obligations of the covenant, Heyns showed how perceptive he was to the danger of Arminianism’ (Faber 1997:303). For all Faber’s insistence on the importance of Heyns’s use of the word ‘obligation’

instead of ‘condition’ when speaking of the covenant, it seems rather that Professor Heyns perceived no such gravity in the distinction. There is only one place that he uses both terms together, and he does express a preference for ‘obligation.’ In speaking of the covenant as ‘unconditional,’ Heyns writes that ‘the condition of obedience was not a condition for being taken into the Covenant, but for keeping the Covenant and for gaining its reward’ (Heyns 1926:131). While Heyns is adamant that there is no ‘condition’ for getting into the covenant, there is most certainly one or more conditions—here he mentions two: faith and obedience (Heyns 1926:131)—for remaining in it. Only near the end of his exposition does he remark: ‘it might be preferable to call faith and obedience not conditions but obligations of the covenant’ (Heyns 1926:131). It seems more likely that Heyns is just pondering aloud the usage of the two words rather than prescribing hard and fast rules for their usage.

On the ‘front end’ of the covenant relationship, if you will, De Jong delineates an objective-subjective scheme in Heyns’s covenant thinking. ‘Heyns operated theologically with this objective-pole (God), subjective-pole (man) schematism’ writes De Jong. ‘On the one hand God *gives, offers, presents, invites* – this is the objective pole. On the other hand man must accept’ (De Jong 1954:76). While Heyns does admit that man is indeed dead in trespasses and sins, even so he can still insist that the Gospel is an offer that humanity must choose to accept (De Jong 1954:76-77).

One possible reason for this insistence on the part of Professor Heyns is his strong belief that the covenant is in no way controlled by eternal election (Faber 1996:37). Contrary to Herman Bavinck, who held that ‘when the covenant of grace is separated from election, it ceases to be a covenant of grace and becomes again a covenant of

works' (Bavinck 1956:272), Heyns, as well as others of the 'American Secession Theologians' (Faber 1996:37), wanted no relation between the covenant of grace and election whatsoever. Hoeksema, following Bavinck, insisted that the covenant of grace was for the elect alone, primarily because it was God who both established and maintained His covenant as a bond of friendship and love with His own (Hoeksema 1966:323-325). This being the case, there could indeed be, for Hoeksema, no talk of conditions for entry into the covenant, and this holds true for the 'back end' of the covenant as well. Heyns, however, readily admitted, as quoted above, that it was up to the believers to keep the covenant, or to keep themselves in the covenant. Obedience here was the key; without it one was a covenant breaker. According to Michael Eaton, in his evaluation the importance of good works in both Arminianism and Calvinism and their relation to salvation, 'In some respects these two theologies are similar. Both assume that salvation and good works are tied together. In one case salvation requires good works; in the other salvation inexorably and irresistibly produces good works. In both theologies salvation and good works stand and fall together' (Eaton 1995:38). For Heyns, unless good works were present, in some unspecified amount, a believer could forfeit the covenant. Maybe this is why Bavinck was so insistent that if one separates the Covenant of Grace from election one is left with a covenant of works once again. This certainly seems to be true in the case of Professor Heyns's view of the 'unconditional' covenant.

7.4 Professor Heyns's Judgment

Professor Heyns was also insistent that unless one accepts both aspects of his covenant scheme, one is guilty of rationalism. He wrote: 'If we do not wish to accept both, we are guilty of a rationalism which either rejects predestination as do the Arminians, or rejects that fact that the free offer of grace is well-meant and general as does ultraorthodoxy. The error may lead both parties in opposite directions, but it is essentially the same error; in both instances it is Rationalism which places its own judgment above the Scriptures' (Heyns 1926:199). Nowhere, at least that I am aware of, does Hoeksema comment specifically on this passage from Heyns. But, knowing Hoeksema, it would undoubtedly have brought a smile to his face.

In his running commentary on the 'Clark Case,' which unfolded in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the early 1940s, Hoeksema analyzes a dilemma which very closely resembles the one posed by Professor Heyns above. Hoeksema writes at some length concerning the 'well-meant' or 'general offer of the Gospel' in this controversy:

Now, you might object as also Dr. Clark does, that this involves a direct contradiction: God sincerely seeks the salvation of those whom He has from eternity determined not to save. Or: God would have that sinner live whom He does not quicken. Or: God would have the sinner, whom He does not give faith, to accept the Gospel. Or: God would have that sinner come to Christ whom He does not draw and who cannot come. You might object that this is not rational. But this objection would be of no avail to persuade the complainants of their error. They admit that this is irrational. But they do not want to be rational on this point. In fact, if you should insist on being rational in this respect, they would call you a "rationalist," and at once proceed to seek your expulsion from the church as a dangerous heretic. The whole *Complaint* against Dr. Clark is really concentrated in and based on this one alleged error of his: he claims that the Word of God and the Christian faith are not irrational. According to the complainants, to be reasonable is to be a rationalist. They write that the trouble with Dr. Clark is that "his rationalism does not permit him to let the two stand unreconciled alongside each other. Rather than do that he would modify the Gospel in the interest of reprobation. [This, you understand, is a slanderous remark.—H.H.] Otherwise expressed, he makes the same error as does the Arminian, although he moves in

the opposite direction. The Arminian cannot harmonize divine reprobation with the sincere divine offer of salvation to all who hear; hence, he rejects the former. Neither can Dr. Clark harmonize the two, and so he detracts from the latter. Rationalism accounts for both errors”. To accuse the complainants of irrationalism is, therefore, of no avail as far as they are concerned. They openly admit—they are even boasting of—their irrational position. To be irrational is, according to them, the glory of a humble, Christian faith. ...even though the complainants themselves insist on being irrational, we will have to deal with them according to the rules of logic. If they refuse to be treated rationally, they really forfeit the right to present a complaint to any assembly of normal Christians. And treating them as rational human beings, we must insist that they do not and cannot possibly accept the proposition: God sincerely seeks the salvation of those whom he has sovereignly from eternity determined to be damned. In other words: I know that they claim to believe this, but I deny their claim; I do not accept it. Hence, I must try to rationalize their position for them. How can any man, with a show of rationality, insist that God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate? Only when they define reprobation as that eternal act of God according to which He determined to damn all those whom he eternally foresaw as rejecting the Gospel [A. C. De Jong holds a very similar position (De Jong 1954:106)—PB]. In other words, I insist that the position of the complainants, as soon as you reject their claim to irrationalism, is purely Arminian. And their irrationalism is only an attempt to camouflage their real position. (Hoeksema 1995: 36-38.)

So then by extrapolation, according to Hoeksema, the choice which Professor Heyns advances above is not between Arminianism and ultraorthodoxy, but rather between two positions both of which are Arminian. It is interesting to note at this juncture that Hoeksema was not alone in this thinking. Richard Muller, describing the views of the seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Leonard Riissen, put it thus:

The “neo-Pelagian” Arminians, however, understand the antecedent will of God as prior to the acts of the creature; and the consequent will they rest not on this *voluntas antecedens*, but on the will of the creature that precedes it in time. God, thus, antecedently wills salvation of all people and consequently wills salvation only for those who have chosen to believe. God from eternity wills the salvation of Judas, while at the same time knowing that Judas will disbelieve, and on the basis of that knowledge, permits Judas to remain in his infidelity and perish. Who, questions Riissen, would be so foolish as to attribute such wills to God? According to this doctrine God genuinely wills that which he knows will never happen, indeed, what he wills not to bring about. (Muller 1995:273-274.)

Still expositing Riissen, Muller does not stop here. In fact, he takes the argument right back into the heart of Heyns's kind of covenant view. He writes: 'In this view, the covenant of God with human beings depends entirely on the human will and, indeed, only those who have chosen God through faith and repentance will be chosen or elected by God' (Muller 1995:274). Hoeksema, in his volume entitled *Believers and Their Seed*, also concludes that Heyns's covenant view is nothing more than 'Arminianism injected into the Covenant' and 'that the presentation of Prof, Heyns is nothing else than the old Pelagian error applied to the covenant' (Hoeksema 1971:20).

There is one more matter, however, to which Professor Heyns alludes that needs further investigation. The word 'ultraorthodoxy' is used by the Professor to set up the horns of the dilemma which, in turn, gives his argument a sense of urgency. This term, however, is nowhere defined by Professor Heyns, leaving the reader to attach to the word whatever mental or emotional connotations come to mind. I bring this up because De Jong equates Hoeksema's views with this term 'ultraorthodoxy' (De Jong 1954:77). In fact, he does so without any stated rationale whatsoever. Maybe he feels he does not need any, as if it has all been done before. Another word with which Hoeksema has been tarred and which continues to plague the Protestant Reformed Churches to this day is 'hyper-Calvinism.' In a sense, these two terms could almost be used interchangeably. One may have even been the forerunner of the other. Both terms, by their use of the prefixes 'ultra' and 'hyper,' are meant to convey a sense of the extreme. If the prefixes are removed, one is simply left with 'Calvinism' and 'orthodoxy.' Hence, the prefixes are meant to take the words beyond 'Calvinism' or 'orthodoxy.' Since 'ultraorthodoxy' is left undefined, I feel that it is used by Professor Heyns more for its emotional effect than to further clarify a

theological position. However, since I am not aware of anywhere else Professor Heyns uses the term ‘ultraorthodoxy’ in alluding to Hoeksema’s position, I want rather to take a closer look at its relative ‘hyper-Calvinism,’ which I will do shortly in connection with the call of the Gospel.

7.5 De Jong’s Criticisms

There is one paragraph in DeJong’s discussion to which I would like to turn briefly because it expresses clearly the characteristics of the discussion. In his summary of the views of Herman Hoeksema and William Heyns with respect to the covenant and common grace, De Jong concludes:

We believe that Hoeksema’s theological reflections concerning God’s covenant with man and concerning common grace are tragically lucid examples of theological reflection in reaction. In Hoeksema’s reaction against what he calls “Heynsian common grace,” and “Kuyperian common grace,” he theologizes so logically and speculatively that he fails to do full justice to various facets of Biblical truth. In fact his reaction to Heyns and Kuyper is so extreme that he arrives at a practical repudiation of some of the very truths he confesses. Because he is essentially a theologian in reaction he becomes speculative. His speculations are logically correct but the very formal correctness of his syllogistic reasoning silences the concrete revelation of Scripture. (De Jong 1954:79.)

This paragraph speaks volumes, but not about Hoeksema. In my opinion, this summary is rather a very carefully constructed assault on someone who is simply disliked. I do not mean to be caustic or defensive in my critique, but this is how this paragraph appears to me. Through the use of allusion, innuendo and loaded words, aspersion is cast on one with whom no substantive fault can be found, at least none is stated. In the first sentence: ‘Hoeksema’s theological reflections ...are tragically lucid examples of theological reflection in reaction.’ Here the word ‘tragically’ is a weasel word. It appears to be used

simply to prejudice the reader against Hoeksema's theological reflections, nothing more. If we simply eliminate it we are left with: 'Hoeksema's theological reflections ...are lucid examples of theological reflection in reaction.' That is to say, Hoeksema's theological reflections are clear examples of a theological position, or positions, set against a position or positions with which he disagrees. In other words, his analysis is clearly understandable. Additionally, in the next sentence: 'In Hoeksema's reaction ...he theologizes so logically and speculatively that he fails to do justice to various facets of Biblical truth.' I have already dealt at some length with Hoeksema's opinions on the use of logic, or being reasonable in the thinking process. The only alternative really would be to be unreasonable or illogical in the thinking process, but then communication, for all intents and purposes, would effectively cease. But what about the word 'speculatively'? De Jong gives no examples of Hoeksema's alleged speculations, but in the last sentence of the quotation he admits that Hoeksema's 'speculations are logically correct.' I guess, given De Jong's definitions, we could just substitute 'logically correct' for 'speculatively' in the second sentence. In which case the second sentence would then read: 'In Hoeksema's reaction ...he theologizes so logically and correctly that he fails to do justice to the various facets of Biblical truth.' Does De Jong really mean to pit Biblical truth against logic? The final sentence seems to indicate that this is indeed the case. Here, De Jong seems to say that logical thinking 'silences the concrete revelation of Scripture.' Hoeksema's response to De Jong's line of reasoning would undoubtedly be that 'either the *logic* of revelation is *our* logic, or there is no revelation' (Hoeksema 1995: 8).

De Jong, it seems, is not the only one who does theology in this manner. In an article revisiting the history and theology of the of the First Point of Common Grace

issued by the Synod of 1924, Raymond Blacketer of the Canadian Reformed Church takes Anthony Hoekema of Calvin Seminary to task for similar reasons. Blacketer writes:

Hoekema asserts that there are two rationalistic solutions that must be avoided: the Arminian proposal of universal, sufficient grace, and the ostensibly hyper-Calvinist contention that the call does not imply God's desire to save the reprobate. We must continue to hold both election and the well-meant offer, "even though we cannot reconcile these two teachings with our finite minds." We cannot "lock God up in the prison of human logic." Hoekema appeals to what he calls the "Scriptural paradox," by which he means that we must believe that apparently incompatible theological statements are in fact somehow resolved in the mind of God. Hoekema appeals to Calvin to justify this method—but not to Calvin himself. He cites Edward Dowey's neo-orthodox interpretation of Calvin as a dialectical theologian, a Barthian before Barth. On this basis, Hoekema contends that Calvin "was willing to combine doctrines which were clear in themselves but logically incompatible with each other, since he found them both in the Bible." But his interpretation of Calvin's methodology is wholly untenable; it cannot be squared with the way Calvin actually operates, particularly in his theological treatises. Calvin argues with opponents by pointing out the logical inconsistencies in their arguments, and demonstrating *both* the biblical faithfulness *and* the logical coherence of his own. Our theological concern, Hoekema concludes, "must not be to build a rationally coherent system, but to be faithful to all the teachings of the Bible." This sentiment, however, is at odds with the Reformation and pre-Reformation conviction that God's revelation is not only reasonable, but accessible to reason, and capable of a coherent systemization. The fact that not everything is revealed to us, and that our theology is limited by our human capacities, does not give us permission to advance an incoherent system of theology. We may not set faith over against logic or confession over against understanding. (Blacketer 2000:50-51.)

Blacketer, however, is not finished. It has been said that 'every theology stands or falls as a hermeneutic and every hermeneutic stands or falls as a theology' (Eaton 1995:32), and this is where Blacketer now brings the brunt of his criticism to bear. He takes his criticism of the 'incoherent,' as it is seen in the system of theology, back to what he believes is a faulty methodology, undoubtedly believing that the method and its product stand or fall together. Picking up where he left off, it is the pitting of 'logic against faith' and 'the confession against understanding' that is characteristic De Jong's thesis on the well-meant offer as well. Blacketer concludes:

This is the problem in De Jong's *Well-Meant Offer*. De Jong, following Berkouwer, employs an existentialistic methodology of correlation that is hostile to the concept of a coherent theological system. Thus he can argue that Calvin speaks "from the viewpoint of faith and not in terms of logical objectivity" (p. 112). Divine sovereignty and human responsibility "is confessed and not explained, for if it could be explained it would no longer be confessed" (p. 99). Like Berkouwer, he argues that the concept of causality is qualitatively different when applied to God than it is when predicated of creatures (p. 98). This assertion is not biblically based, but founded in the Kantian distinction, and insuperable divide, between the noumenal and phenomenal realms—a distinction that renders the reliability of God's revelation suspect. While De Jong criticizes Hoeksema's methodology in terms of its ostensible "competitive polarity motif," his own methodology also constitutes the imposition of an extra-biblical conceptual construct, namely, the dialectical "both/and" of the correlation motif. One could easily argue that the "either/or" motif is in fact more dominant in Scripture. (Blacketer 2000:51.)

The views here criticized by Blacketer were in many ways the same issues that made up the Clark Case in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the 1940s and about which Hoeksema commented so heavily. In the course of the Clark Case, it was primarily Cornelius van Til, John Murray, and Ned Stonehouse of Westminster Theological Seminary who were the complainants against Gordon Clark's ordination by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Clark was accused of denying the incomprehensibility of God. In point of fact, both Clark and his detractors readily admitted to believing in God's incomprehensibility (Hoeksema 1995:6-12). The difference was in what each party meant by 'incomprehensibility.' For Clark, 'Man can never know exhaustively and completely God's knowledge of any truth in all of its relationships and implications; because every truth has an infinite number of relationships and implications and since each of these implications in turn has other infinite implications, these must ever, even in heaven, remaining exhaustible for man' (Hoeksema 1995:10). That is to say, for Clark, God's knowledge is quantitatively different than human knowledge; God simply knows more.

For his detractors, especially Cornelius Van Til, this conception of the incomprehensibility of God was wholly inadequate. For Van Til and the others, God's knowledge was qualitatively different from that available to humanity. That is to say, for Van Til, 'a proposition does not have the same meaning for God as for man' (Hoeksema 1995:11). In order to protect what he termed 'the Creator/creator distinction' (Frame 1976:37; Van Til 1967:32 ff.), Van Til conceived of all of human knowledge as 'analogical' (Van Til 1967:39). But, for Van Til, analogical means that 'God's knowledge and Man's knowledge "do not coincide at any single point"' (Robbins 1986:33). De Jong is also concerned to maintain this same Creator/creature distinction. He writes that 'we must remember that causation when predicated of God is qualitatively different from causation when predicated of the creature. In our logical categories we must keep the Creator/creature relationship inviolate' (De Jong 1954:98). Elsewhere, De Jong writes that 'at root of all Hoeksema's argumentation against a well-meant offer of grace lies a misconstruction of the dynamic and reciprocal fellowship which exists between God and man' (De Jong 1954:72). This misconstruction De Jong terms 'Hoeksema's competitive polarity motif' in which Hoeksema supposedly pits God over against man, and in which he not only 'incorrectly applies the categories of human logic to God's decreeing activity, but he also inaccurately conceives of this decree in temporal terms.... This in turn compels Hoeksema to view the elect as a number of chosen individuals who live in a dualistic-antithetic relationship to other individuals whom God sovereignly reprobates' (De Jong 1954).83-84). It is interesting that De Jong's emphasis on this 'polarity motif,' which bears striking resemblance to what he elsewhere refers to

as the ‘Creator/creature distinction,’ is somehow responsible for Hoeksema’s viewing humanity along antithetical lines.

It is also because of this Creator/creature distinction that Van Til believes Christians must ‘not attempt to “solve” the “paradoxes” involved in the relationship of the self-contained God to his dependent creatures’ (Robbins 1986:28). ‘Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us,’ writes Van Til, ‘we are bound to come into what seems to be a contradiction in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical’ (Van Til 1967:44). Hence, the use of human logic, ‘the demand for non-contradiction when carried to its logical conclusion reduces God’s truth to man’s truth’ (Robbins 1986:5, from an interview in *Christianity Today*, December 30, 1977). John Frame, in his discussion of Van Til’s belief that ‘theological concepts are “limiting concepts”’ takes the argument for the origin of Van Til’s thought right back to the discussion of the ‘noumenal world’ as it appears in Immanuel Kant (Frame 1976:34).

While Raymond Blacketer sees the problems inherent in De Jong’s *Well-Meant Offer* stemming from G. C. Berkouwer, I have quoted the events and ideas surrounding the Clark Case to show that these same ideas were prominent on this side of the Atlantic as well. Hoeksema wrote extensively on the Clark Case pointing out the irrationalism that surrounded it; then a decade later, De Jong criticizes Hoeksema severely in his thesis, using many of the same ideas and terms Hoeksema exposed in the Clark Case as irrational.

Additionally, throughout his analysis of Hoeksema’s views on the covenant and common grace, De Jong constantly refers to Hoeksema’s theology as ‘reactionary’ in one way or another. One has only to read Hoeksema’s treatment of the covenant of grace to

see that this is not the case. God's covenant is established and maintained by God. God's covenant is a bond of friendship and love with the elect. God's covenant is controlled by sovereign, eternal election and as such is for the elect in Christ alone. Hence, entrance into the covenant, as well as remaining in it—as if it were even possible to fall out of it somehow as Heyns maintains—is solely a function of God's sovereign, particular grace. Everywhere Hoeksema speaks of what the covenant 'is' and what grace 'is,' not what they 'are not.' If his theology was indeed so reactionary, would it not be characterized by negativity? But this is certainly not the case. His exposition of these concepts is entirely positive. Where then, I ask, is the reaction? If Hoeksema used the concepts provided by Professor Heyns, as well as others, to develop his own positive concepts, how is this to be considered reactionary theology? Is this not how theology is done?

It is interesting to note that Hoeksema's own review of De Jong's thesis in *The Standard Bearer* is less than one quarter of a page and ends with the question: 'What grace do the reprobate receive in and through the preaching of the gospel?' (Hoeksema 1954:439).

7.6 Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel

Hyper-Calvinism, although it may seem to be a very precise technical term which accurately describes an aberrant form of Calvinism, is in reality a term about which there seems to be no agreement as to precise definition. I bring this up because the Protestant Reformed Churches in general, and Hoeksema specifically, have been accused of hyper-Calvinism repeatedly over the years, primarily due to their denial of the free offer of the

Gospel, and that always, it seems, in a rather off-handed manner. The Protestant Reformed Churches respond to the charge by saying that hyper-Calvinism is just another way to label those who maintain a staunch Calvinism. Additionally, they maintain that hyper-Calvinism refers rather to a particular view of the external call of the Gospel, i.e. the preaching. David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Churches testifies that:

“Hyper-Calvinism” is a term of reproach and condemnation. It is the charge that a theological teaching which claims to be Calvinism has, in fact, so exaggerated and distorted Calvinism that it is not genuine Calvinism at all. The body of doctrines described as hyper-Calvinism is accused of having gone beyond true Calvinism so that, although it has a semblance of Calvinism, it is, in reality, a perversion of Calvinism. Indeed, the seriousness of the epithet “hyper-Calvinism” is that it alleges a theological position to be false doctrine. In Calvinistic circles, it is common to blacken with this brush all those who deny “the offer of the gospel.” Since the Protestant Reformed Churches are known to deny the offer, we are dismissed, often out-of-hand, as hyper-Calvinists. This is persistently done by some who know better. The Christian Reformed magazine, *The Banner*, repeated the old canard in its issue of September 28, 1973, when it stated that the Christian Reformed Church opposed the “doctrinal deviation” of “hyper-Calvinism in the Common Grace controversy.” (Engelsma 1980:1.)

There is, however, precedent for the Christian Reformed Church using the term in this manner and it is not necessarily as sinister as Engelsma makes out, although I am sure this does not apply to all who employ the term. Curt Daniel, in his massive study on the oft-described ‘hyper-Calvinism’ of the eighteenth-century English Baptist John Gill, quotes Jay Green, the publisher responsible for the reissuing of Gill’s *Body of Divinity* in the 1950s, to the effect that there is no such thing as hyper-Calvinism, and that the term is nothing more than a term of approbation to be used on the enemies of Calvinism (Daniel 1983:756). Daniel himself, however, does not see it this way. Contrariwise, he considers the denial of the free offer of the Gospel to be a constituent part of any definition of hyper-Calvinism. ‘Surely Engelsma,’ Daniel believes, ‘and anyone else who studies the history of Calvinism must be aware that there are varieties of Calvinism. That most of

those who deny the doctrine of the free offer also reject the label “Hyper-Calvinist” is obvious, for to accept it is virtually tantamount to admitting that one is either in error or that he has gone beyond Calvin’ (Daniel 1983:756-757). After several hundred pages of historical investigation, Daniel offers us the following definition of hyper-Calvinism:

Hyper-Calvinism is that school of Supralapsarian “Five Point” Calvinism which so stresses the sovereignty of God by over-emphasizing the secret over the revealed will and eternity over time, that it minimizes the responsibility of Man, notably with respect to the denial of the word “offer” in relation to the preaching of the Gospel of a finished and limited atonement, thus undermining the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly with the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ died for them, with the result that presumption is overly warned of, introspection is overly encouraged, and a view of sanctification akin to doctrinal Antinomianism is often approached. (Daniel 1983:767.)

Daniel wishes to differentiate yet further:

This could be summarized even further: it is a rejection of the word “offer” in connection with evangelism for supposedly Calvinistic reasons. In all our researches, the only real tangible thing which differentiates the Hyper from the High Calvinists is the word “offer.” The Supralapsarians were brought to the very door of Hyper-Calvinism but those who accepted free offers failed to enter into the realm of the most extreme variety of Calvinism that the history of Reformed theology has yet seen. (Daniel 1983:767.)

Daniel is good enough to spell out carefully his definition, and I think it is one which could even be distilled a bit further. On the last page Daniel says that a hyper-Calvinist is one who has simply gone beyond Calvin. This is clear enough. In the above quotes the denial of the word ‘offer’ as it relates to the preaching of the Gospel seems to hold sway. If we put these two concepts together, a clearer picture of the hyper-Calvinist seems to emerge. Hence, a hyper-Calvinist is one who has gone beyond Calvin by denying the free offer of the Gospel. Here we seem to have a standard, or measure by which to determine who is and who is not a hyper-Calvinist. Daniel is not alone in defining hyper-Calvinism in this way. K. W. Stebbins, minister of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

and author of the book *Christ Freely Offered*, concurs wholeheartedly. While his purpose in writing is different, Stebbins refers to what ‘is normally called the hypercalvinist controversy, in which the free offer is denied on the grounds of man’s inability’ (Stebbins 1978:6).

In much of the writing done on the free offer, the offer of the Gospel and the call of the Gospel are just assumed to mean the same thing. Hoeksema insisted that these terms and the concepts they represent were not the same, while his detractors said they were. Raymond Blacketer comments on the debate over these terms as it occurred in the Christian Reformed Church in 1924:

There are numerous historical and logical errors in both the synodical report and Berkhof’s defense of the well-meant offer. The most glaring logical jump is that which the synod and Berkhof make from the concept of *call* to that of *offer*. In the synodical material and in Berkhof’s defense of the three points, these two terms are used synonymously and interchangeably. Berkhof states that “this calling of the Gospel, or this offer of salvation, is, according to the synod, *universal*.” The position of Hoeksema and Danhof, however, was precisely that the nature of the call was not that of an offer, particularly in the modern sense of the term. To use call and offer interchangeable, therefore, begs the question. (Blacketer 2000:40.)

The one assumption made by both Daniel and Stebbins in their formulation of the hyper-Calvinist is that Calvin subscribed to the free offer of the Gospel as outlined in 1924. If Calvin did not subscribe to the free offer of the Gospel, then the charge of hyper-Calvinism is an empty one. Further, it is shown to be, as Jay Green and David Engelsma both maintain, nothing more than a term of approbation with which to tar one’s enemies.

7.7 Calvin and the Free Offer

In deciding whether to enlist Calvin in our arsenal to defend any particular doctrine or opinion it is important, as Herman Hanko reminds us, that we ‘not attempt to interpret the Reformers and their views in the light of our modern times and modern theological controversies’ (Hanko 1989:20). I say this because many think, even today that to enlist the great name of Calvin is somehow to sanctify the subject. The famous nineteenth-century Scottish Theologian, William Cunningham, rightly warned us against just such an approach (Cunningham 1979:400-401). Furthermore, according to Herman Hanko:

Calvin himself never faced specifically and concretely the question of the free offer of the gospel any more than did Luther. ...the nature and character of the preaching was not an issue between the Reformers and the Romish church. Although there are innumerable passages in Calvin’s writings which make use of the word “offer,” ...the actual theology of the free offer was a question which Calvin did not face. The issue arose over a half century later. ...it is clear from all Calvin’s writings that he militated against all the ideas which have become such an integral part of the free offer theology. (Hanko 1989:27.)

Given Hanko’s direction, I think it profitable to identify those ideas, or doctrines which have become associated with the free offer theology, and thus distill the free offer to its essence.

First of all, I would like to examine the difference of opinion surrounding the use of the word ‘offer.’ According to David Engelsma, ‘It is of no consequence, therefore, that the term “offer” appears in Calvin, in other Reformed theologians, and in such Reformed creeds as the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The word “offer” had originally a sound meaning: “serious call,” “presentation of Christ”’ (Engelsma 1980:81). Also with respect to the word ‘offer,’ Reverend Barry Gritters, also of the Protestant Reformed Churches, writes:

It must be noted that Calvin wrote his *Institutes* in the Latin language. The word translated “offer” in English is, not surprisingly, *offere* in Latin. But this word did not necessarily have the same connotations then as it does in English today. The word *offere* primarily means “to present, to bring towards, to thrust forward, to show, to exhibit.” Our word *offer* has broader connotations and implies the ability to accept or reject, as well as a desire on God’s part that the offer be accepted. (Gritters 1988:33.)

While I agree that the Latin ‘offere’ may not be an exact synonym for the English ‘offer,’ I would not be willing let the matter stand or fall on the basis of the origin of this one word. Besides, *Cassell’s Latin-English Dictionary* defines ‘offero’ as: ‘to carry or bring to, place before, present, produce, offer’ (Cassell’s 1959:380).

The real question surrounding the free offer of the gospel is not the origin of the word ‘offer,’ but the theology behind the ‘free offer.’ According the book *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, put out by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, strong exponents of the free offer, ‘it would appear that the real point of dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God **desires** the salvation of all men’ (Murray & Stonehouse 1948:3). In his commentary on the ‘Clark Case,’ also within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Hoeksema writes at some length concerning this desire of God to save all men:

According to the complainants the preacher is called to proclaim to all his hearers *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of them all*. If this is not their meaning when they write: “in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect,” their words have no meaning at all. According to Dr. Clark, however, the preacher proclaims to all his hearers promiscuously *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of all the elect*. The elect may be variously named in the preaching: those who repent, they that believe in Christ, that hunger for the bread of life, that thirst for the water of life, that seek, knock, ask, that come to Christ, etc. etc. But they are always the elect. We may define the issue still more sharply, and limit it to God’s intention and attitude in the preaching of the Gospel *with regard to the reprobate*. For it is more especially about the reprobate and their salvation that the complainants are concerned. Strange though it may seem, paradoxical though it may sound, they want to leave room in their preaching for *the salvation of the reprobate*. For the sake of clarity, therefore, we

can safely leave the elect out of our discussion. That God sincerely seeks their salvation is not a matter of controversy. To drag them into the discussion of this question simply confuses things. The question very really concerns the attitude of God with respect to the reprobate. We may limit the controversy to this question: What must the preacher of the Gospel say of God's intention with respect to the reprobate? And these, too, may be called by different names, such as, the impenitent, the wicked, the unbelievers, etc. The answer to this question defines the difference between Dr. Clark and the complainants sharply and precisely. The complainants answer: The preacher must say that God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate through the preaching of the Gospel. (Hoeksema 1995:35.)

While some may insist that Hoeksema distills the concerns of the complainants a bit too far, it is interesting to note that the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 and Calvin Seminary Professor of Theology, Louis Berkhof, both believed 'that God genuinely offers salvation to all who hear the gospel, including the reprobate—those whom he has decreed to leave in their state of rebellion and to withhold from them “saving faith and the grace of conversion”' (Blacketer 2000:41).

At this point, I would like to ask the question: How are we to understand this doctrine of reprobation? Harry Boer, foreign missionary and teacher for the Christian Reformed Church and no friend of reprobation, writes concerning election and reprobation:

The fact that God “leaves” the non-elect to their own wickedness may give the impression that reprobation simply means non-election. The casual reader may be left with the thought that God overlooked the reprobate *without* having the deliberate *intention* of abandoning them to their wickedness, and therefore without taking any positive steps to effect their reprobation. Such a reading of the decree, however, Dort utterly excludes. ...the driving power in God by which, according to Dort, he effected the reprobation of the non-elect *is the same* as that which effected the salvation of the elect. At this point we wish only to note that reprobation has a *purpose*, a rationale if you will, of the same magnitude as the purpose that underlies the decree of election. The latter is “the demonstration of His mercy” (Art.7); the purpose of reprobation is “the declaration of his justice” (Art.15). (Boer 1983:11.)

Harry Boer, because of his work as a missionary, did not like the message the doctrine of reprobation constrained him to preach. A. C. De Jong, in his thesis on Hoeksema, is not remiss to register his dislike for the doctrine also (De Jong 1954:114). ‘Why not,’ writes Boer, ‘write it off as an antiquated piece of rationalistic theology long since left behind?’ (Boer 1983:viii). Boer knew better. He knew that the doctrine was much too potent for that. There were other concerns, Boer writes: ‘to repudiate reprobation while retaining a numerical conception of election leaves wide open the problem of the “non-elect”’ (Boer: 1990:105). Hence, in 1977 he submitted a ‘Gravamen’ to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church protesting the doctrine of reprobation as unsound. His protest, after much consideration, was rejected.

Harry Boer, despite his dislike of the doctrine of reprobation, shows clearly that God has a purpose in it. It is not incidental to election. It is decretal in nature and, as such, part of God’s counsel with respect to the world and its disposition. The free offer of the Gospel, by contrast, makes reprobation incidental, an after thought on God’s part. This trivializes reprobation to the point where one may wonder whether God has any definite plan with respect to the reprobate. Only if God has no definite plans with respect to the reprobate may they be thought of as objects of God’s favor and, hence, objects of a free offer of the Gospel in which God sincerely desires their salvation. But, according to Hoeksema, God has a definite plan with regard to the reprobate in history. This plan is for ‘those who are presently to be damned must for a time serve the salvation of the elect, be it in an antithetical manner. In this sense reprobation is a divine necessity. In this sense, the reprobate exist for the sake of the elect’ (Hoeksema 1993:9-10). That is to say, reprobation serves election. The reprobate are used, according to the providence of God,

to mold and to sanctify the elect in this world. And, while their actions towards the elect may be either good or evil, God uses it all for the good

What does Calvin say about God desiring the salvation of all people, especially the reprobate? Since the charge of hyper-Calvinism lodged against Hoeksema hinges upon just this point, I wish to quote from Calvin at some length.

In Book III Chapter 22, Section 10 of the *Institutes*, Calvin writes:

Some object that God would be contrary to Himself if he should universally invite all men to him but admit only a few as elect. Thus, in their view, the universality of the promises removes the distinction of special grace.... I have elsewhere explained how Scripture reconciles the two notions that all are called to repentance and faith by outward preaching, yet that the spirit of repentance and faith is not given to all. Soon I shall have to repeat some of this. Now I deny what they claim, since it is false in two ways. For he who threatens that while it will rain upon one city there will be drought in another [Amos 4:7], and who elsewhere announces a famine of teaching [Amos 8:11], does not bind himself by a set law to call all men equally. And he who, forbidding Paul to speak the word in Asia [Acts 16:6], and turning him aside from Bithynia, draws him into Macedonia [Acts 16:7 ff.] thus shows that he has the right to distribute this treasure to whom he pleases. Through Isaiah he still more openly shows how he directs the promises of salvation specifically to the elect: for he proclaims that they alone, not the whole human race without distinction, are to become his disciples [Isaiah 8:16]. Hence it is clear that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be reserved solely and individually for the sons of the church, is falsely debased when presented as effectually profitable to all. (Calvin 1960:944.)

In Book III, Chapter 24, Section 1, Calvin writes:

But to make the matter clearer, we must deal with both the calling of the elect and the blinding and hardening of the wicked. Of the former I have already said something, when refuting the error of those who think that the universality of the promises makes all mankind equal. Yet it is not without choice that God by his call manifests the election, which he otherwise holds hidden within himself; accordingly, it may properly be termed his “attestation.” (Calvin 1960:964.)

Calvin also shows that the preaching of the Gospel in itself is not to be considered ‘grace’ to all, especially the reprobate. In fact, in the next section, he has a very different view of

the preaching than the proponents of the free offer. In Book III, Chapter 24, Section 8, Calvin writes:

The statement of Christ “Many are called but few are chosen” [Matt 22:14] is, in this manner, very badly understood. Nothing will be ambiguous if we hold fast to what ought to be clear from the foregoing: That there are two kinds of call. There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death [cf. II Cor. 2:16], and as the occasion for severer condemnation. (Calvin 1960:974.)

Again, dealing with effects of the outward call, the preaching of the Gospel, Calvin writes in Book III, Chapter 24, Section 12:

As God by the effectual working of his call to the elect perfects the salvation to which by his eternal plan he has destined them, so he has his judgments against the reprobate, by which he executed his plan for them. What of those, then, whom he created for dishonor in life and destruction in death, to become the instruments of his wrath and examples of his severity? That they may come to their end, he sometimes deprives them of the capacity to hear his word; at other times he, rather, blinds and stuns them by the preaching of it. (Calvin 1960:978.)

In Book III, Chapter 24, Section 15, Calvin comments on the passage in Ezekiel 33 so often appealed to by those who advocate the free offer:

But our opponents are in the habit of quoting in opposition a few Scripture passages in which God seems to deny that the wicked perish by his ordination, except in so far as by their clamorous protests they of their own accord bring death upon themselves. Let us therefore briefly explain these passages and prove that they do not conflict with the foregoing opinion. A passage of Ezekiel’s is brought forward, that “God does not will the death of the wicked but wills that the wicked turn back and live” [Ezek. 33:11 p.]. If it pleases God to extend this to the whole human race, why does he not encourage to repentance the very many whose minds are more amenable to obedience than the minds of those who grow harder and harder at his daily invitations? Among the people of Nineveh [cf. Matt. 12:41] and of Sodom, as Christ testifies, the preaching of the gospel and miracles would have accomplished more than in Judea [Matt. 11:23]. If God wills that all be saved, how does it come to pass that he does not open the door of repentance to the miserable men who would be better prepared to receive Grace? Hence we may see that this passage is violently twisted if the will of God, mentioned by the prophet, is opposed to His eternal plan, by which He has distinguished the elect from the reprobate. Now if we are seeking the prophet’s true meaning, it is that he would bring the hope of pardon to the penitent only. The gist of it is that God is

without doubt ready to forgive, as soon as the sinner is converted. Therefore, in so far as God wills the sinner's repentance, he does not will his death. But experience teaches that God wills the repentance of those whom he invites to himself, in such a way that he does not touch the hearts of all. Yet it is not on that account to be said that he acts deceitfully, for even though only his outward call renders inexcusable those who hear it and do not obey, still it is truly considered evidence of God's grace, by which he reconciles men to himself. Let us therefore regard the prophet's instruction that the death of the sinner is not pleasing to God as designed to assure believers that God is ready to pardon them as soon as they are touched by repentance but to make the wicked feel that their transgression is doubled because they do not respond to God's great kindness and goodness. God's mercy will always, accordingly, go to meet repentance, but all the prophets and all the apostles, as well as Ezekiel himself, clearly teach to whom repentance is given. (Calvin 1960:982-983.)

In his answer to Pighius, in *The Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin concludes:

Now let Pighius boast, if he can, that God willeth *all men* to be saved! The above arguments, founded on the Scriptures, prove that even the external preaching of the doctrine of the doctrine of salvation, which is very far inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, was not made of God common to *all men*. (Calvin 1950:104.)

Or, in the words of William Cunningham:

Calvin consistently, unhesitatingly, and explicitly denied the doctrine of God's universal grace and love to all men,—that is, *omnibus et singulis*, to each and every man,—as implying in some sense a desire or purpose or intention to save them all; and with this universal grace or love to all men the doctrine of a universal or unlimited atonement, in the nature of the case, and in the convictions and admissions of all its supporters, stands inseparably connected. (Cunningham 1979:398.)

I think it abundantly clear from the preceding quotes from Calvin that he did not hold to a free offer of the Gospel in the sense that is it held in this day and age. Calvin is emphatic that God does not desire the salvation of the reprobate, as He is the one who reprobated them. After all, is not the assertion that there is a desire on God's part for the salvation of all at the very heart of the 'well-meant offer of salvation to all'? I think that the above quotes from Calvin demonstrate conclusively that there is no desire on the part of God for

the salvation of all of humanity, and the preaching of the Gospel is in no way ‘grace’ to all those that hear it.

I think it is equally clear from Calvin’s words that Hoeksema, in his writings on common grace as it relates to the free offer of the Gospel, did not depart from the doctrine of the Genevan Reformer in any way. If, therefore, Hoeksema did not go beyond Calvin in his denial of the free offer of the Gospel, I conclude then the charge of hyper-Calvinism is thoroughly unfounded.

David Engelsma, however, has a slightly different definition of hyper-Calvinism, a definition that came into its own in 1924 and that is more a variant to the one which we have been discussing. It is really the more common, the less technical, of the two definitions. Engelsma writes:

But hyper-Calvinism is the denial that God, in the preaching of the gospel, calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher’s addressing the call of the gospel, “repent and believe on Christ crucified,” only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration, and thereby of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation. (Engelsma 1980:11.)

Practically, what this means is that a minister can only preach the Gospel to the elect, or at least only to those who give sufficient evidence of possibly being elect. In his book, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, Engelsma says that this concept actually took hold in certain quarters in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. Evidence of this position can, according to Engelsma, be found in ministries of Joseph Hussey, John Brine, John Gill and others (Engelsma 1980:11). Engelsma bases his study of hyper-Calvinism on Peter Toon’s *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (Toon 1967). I have read Toon’s book and I can find no

evidence this practice was anywhere accepted. Curt Daniel, in his study of hyper-Calvinism, has this to say on the matter: ‘Among other remarkable things is that Engelsma relies so heavily upon Toon, with whom we are in basic agreement. To our knowledge, Toon does not suggest that Gill or Hussey felt that ministers should preach the Gospel only to the elect’ (Daniel 1983:766).

Still, it does seem that Hoeksema was accused of this variety of hyper-Calvinism also. Louis Berkhof, formerly Professor of Theology at Calvin Seminary, seems to be the culprit here, writes Raymond Blacketer:

It is an unfortunate fact that Berkhof demonstrates very little familiarity with the actual views of Hoeksema and Danhof, and he frequently mischaracterizes their position. He accuses the ministers of preaching only to the elect, and ridicules them for attempting something that only Christ himself could do (since only he knows who the elect are), and that in fact did not do. (Blacketer 2000:40.)

Hoeksema was, however, exonerated of holding this variety of hyper-Calvinism as well.

A. C. De Jong wrote:

The preacher need not concern himself about the particular character of his audience, the collectivity with an elect kernel and a reprobate husk. We mention this since Hoeksema was frequently accused of forcing the preacher into an impossible situation [preaching only to the elect-PB]. But Hoeksema would never bow to this objection. The preacher, according to him, preaches to everyone, but his preaching is so used by God to save the elect kernel and to increase the responsibility of the reprobate husk, which does not believe the truths proclaimed by the preacher. (De Jong 1954:47-48.)

7.8 G. C. Berkouwer

While not mentioning hyper-Calvinism specifically, Professor G.C. Berkouwer of the Free University also believes that, for Hoeksema, given his denial of the free offer,

‘the “joyful” message, the good news, can really be addressed only to the elect’ (Berkouwer 1977:98). This seems to me, allowing for the different expressions, to be the same criticism that Professor Berkhof also leveled against Hoeksema. On the same page, Berkouwer also says that for Hoeksema, ‘if the gospel is universally preached, it is possible and meaningful only in the sense that no one knows who the elect are’ (Berkouwer 1977:98). Responding to the first of Berkouwer’s statements, Hoeksema’s son, Homer, wrote: ‘If Hoeksema ever mentioned this idea, it was usually in reply to the false charge that he preached only to the elect—a thought which to him was utterly ridiculous for its impossibility’ (Hoeksema 1975:44). Berkouwer’s second statement assumes that the preaching of the gospel, aside from a general offer of salvation, holds no specific purpose for the reprobate. Hoeksema emphatically denied this. As his son writes:

One could without difficulty point to a dozen passages in Hoeksema’s writings which give the lie to this claim of Berkouwer. The fact of the matter is that Hoeksema rarely made mention of this fact of our not knowing who the elect are. He certainly never taught that this was what made the general proclamation of the gospel possible and meaningful. And still more certainly, he never taught that this general proclamation was possible and meaningful only because of this. Numerous times Hoeksema emphasized that it was God’s sovereign good pleasure that the gospel also be proclaimed to the reprobate—not that this was due merely to the preacher’s inability to identify the elect. Numerous times Hoeksema emphasized that the preaching of the gospel has a positive purpose also with respect to the reprobate, namely, the manifestation of the sinfulness of sin, the hardening of the reprobate, and thus the historical realization of God’s counsel of reprobation, and ultimately theodicy. I dare say that as often as Hoeksema expounded this subject of election and reprobation in relation to the preaching of the gospel, he emphasized this. And almost as often as he spoke or wrote on the subject of preaching and its purpose, he made mention of the fact of the two-fold purpose and effect of the preaching. (Hoeksema 1975:44-45.)

The reason I bring Berkouwer into the discussion at this point is because of his importance as a theologian and because he himself states that it was Hoeksema who exercised great influence on his thinking about election and reprobation in a discussion

stemming from the free offer of the gospel (Berkouwer 1977:98). ‘When I met Hoeksema in 1952’ Berkouwer recalls, ‘I was impressed anew that his manner of thinking about election was impossible’ (Berkouwer 1977:98). The ‘impossibility’ to which Berkouwer refers is any reconciliation between the free offer of the gospel and the decree of election and reprobation. He writes that ‘in view of the a priori decree of election and reprobation, universal proclamation is not possible, so long as the seriousness and genuinely intended offer of grace is concerned’ (Berkouwer 1977:98).

Earlier it was Professor Heyns who insisted that it was a sign of rationalism if one did not hold these two concepts, election and the free offer, in tension. De Jong considered Hoeksema a rationalist because he rejected the free offer as inconsistent with election. By Heyns’s definition, the case could be made that Berkouwer also qualifies as a rationalist since he redefines election and reprobation in favor of the free offer of the gospel. On this matter Homer Hoeksema comments at some length:

Berkouwer denies double predestination. He has stated this forthrightly in connection with a recent visit to the synod of the Hervormde Kerk at the time when the Testimony of Faith (forerunner to a new confession) was presented there.... What is of even greater significance is the fact that Berkouwer here confirms what we have always claimed in connection with the error of the general well-meant offer of grace, namely: that theological consistency (in the light of scripture and the confessions) forces one to choose between the well-meant offer of grace and the truth of sovereign (double) predestination. In the past many theologians have attempted to follow a double-track theology, with the practical result that while they did lip-service to the truth of sovereign predestination, they actually forgot that “track” and concentrated on the well-meant offer “track” in their preaching and teaching. Bear in mind that the alternatives are emphatically not the general, or promiscuous, proclamation of the gospel and double predestination.... But the alternatives are the general, well-meant offer and double predestination. These, we have always insisted, are mutually exclusive. But Berkouwer has at last—and consistently—chosen for the general offer and has denied double predestination. His position is dead wrong and constitutes a break with the Reformed tradition, but it is at least consistent. And by this open and consistent choice he has confirmed what we have always maintained in this regard. Would that everyone who wants to maintain the general, well-meant offer

of grace were as consistent as Berkouwer. Then, at least, we would all know where we stand in relation to one another. (Hoeksema 1975:41-43.)

It seems that for all his theological acumen, Berkouwer's choice of the free offer of the gospel over against election and reprobation, and by contrast, his criticism of Hoeksema's position, is based on a misunderstanding. Berkouwer, as with Hoeksema's critics in 1924, maintains that the free offer of the gospel and the promiscuous preaching of the gospel are the same (Berkouwer 1977:98-100). This criticism, as is evident at the outset, sets the stage for the charge of hyper-Calvinism. After all, if the gospel message is not an offer which God graciously meant for all to accept, then why preach to all except the elect? In fact, preaching to any others than the elect is at worse an insult and in the very least a cruel joke to the non-elect. The confusion here results from identifying the external call of the gospel with a well-meant offer of grace. They are not the same.

Raymond Blacketer, whom I quoted earlier in his dealings with the events of 1924, castigates Louis Berkhof, one of Hoeksema's detractors in 1924, for his 'glaring logical jump ... from the concept of *call* to that of *offer*' (Blacketer 2000:40). Blacketer goes on to say that 'the position of Hoeksema and Danhof ... was precisely that the nature of the call was not that of an offer, particularly in the modern sense of the term. To use call and offer interchangeably, therefore begs the question' (Blacketer 2000:40). Homer Hoeksema points out this same confusion of terms in Berkouwer. He writes:

Berkouwer repeatedly confuses the concepts universal preaching and universal offer. The former Hoeksema steadfastly maintained; the latter he steadfastly denied. Indeed Hoeksema subscribed (with more than lip service) to Canons II, 5, but he always pointed out that Canons II, 5 does not speak of a general, conditional offer, but of the general proclamation of a particular promise. What Hoeksema denied was that the nature of the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel was that of a general, well-meant offer of grace. (Hoeksema 1975:44.)

By way of contrast, Hoeksema believed that the message of the gospel is a command and not an offer, and, hence, is to be preached promiscuously to all. Naturally, only those whom God has already regenerated will be able to obey the command.

G.C. Berkouwer was truly an eminent theologian in his own right, but to take up a further analysis of his theology in comparison with Hoeksema's would take us beyond the confines of our topic.

7.9 Raymond Blacketer's Assessment

The proof adduced for the first point of the Kalamazoo points is problematic. In the first place, Reformed theology has generally been reticent to connect any common or universal grace with the process of salvation, particularly since the Remonstrant party, the Arminians, conceived of common grace as a factor that made all individuals capable of responding to the gospel call. The first point, however, considers the universality of the call of the gospel to be evidence for the existence of common grace. More significant, however, is the introduction of the concept of the universal, well-meant offer of salvation. A historical examination of the issue will demonstrate that at this point the synod introduced a quite debatable doctrine into the church, and in doing so misinterpreted the confessions and prominent Reformed theologians. The result was that the ministers Hoeksema and Danhof were condemned, in part, for defending the proper interpretation of the Reformed confessions. Even if one considers their sweeping rejection of common grace to be dubious and extreme, their repudiation of the well-meant offer is much more defensible from a historical and confessional perspective. A further result was that the Christian Reformed Church was left with a doctrine that is of doubtful logical coherence, given the soteriological framework confessed in the Canons of Dort, and that does not find support among leading theological figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The cause of this unfortunate state of affairs, moreover, appears to be a lamentable lack of careful historical and theological study of the issue by the 1924 synod and its defenders, as well as extreme and uncharitable recriminations on both sides. (Blacketer 2000:39.)

7.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavored to show Hoeksema's response to the First Point of Common Grace as outlined in the decisions of 1924. To do this I have relied to a good degree on the thesis by A. C. De Jong which purports to discuss these views. Along the way I have pointed out some of the deficiencies inherent in De Jong, and by implication in Professor Heyns as well. The main thing, above all else, which I have sought to bring out in this chapter, simply because of its importance for the Reformed faith, is the total lack of conditionality in Hoeksema's theology. Whether it presents itself under the guise of the free offer of the Gospel, or presents itself in the demands by which you must keep yourself in the covenant, Hoeksema repudiated it all. God saves those whom He has chosen from before the foundation of the world. It is not up to them to save themselves, or to somehow keep that salvation once it is given them. Human nature can not effect salvation, nor add to it. All is dependent upon the sovereign, particular grace of God. There is no conditionality here.

I have also proven that in his repudiation of the free offer of the Gospel, Hoeksema did not depart from the path blazed by Calvin. Calvin did not hold to the theology of the free offer and, therefore, Hoeksema did not go beyond him in denying it. Hoeksema was no hyper-Calvinist.

In his stand for sovereign, particular grace; a grace with no strings or conditions, Hoeksema, contra what some may say, was a direct theological descendent of Calvin. A genealogy to which, I might add, the free offer of the Gospel and the conditional covenant are foreign.